

LD 1364 Testimony  
April 27, 2023  
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Lewiston, Maine

Good Morning Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Salisbury and members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee.

My name is Molly Whyte, I am the program manager of the Church of Safe Injection, a state-certified syringe service program and harm reduction organization and I reside in Lewiston Maine. I am here today testifying in support of LD 1364, *An Act to Prevent Opioid Overdose Deaths by Establishing Safe Consumption Sites*, sponsored by Representative Lookner.

I've spent the last 3 years working for a harm reduction organization, learning alongside two harm reductionists many people in this room call mentors - Jesse Harvey and Kari Morissette. Unfortunately, these two will not be standing before you to testify today as they both have sadly died, Jesse in 2020 and Kari in 2022, of accidental overdose. They were both alone when they died.

It is exhausting to do the work we do every day. Not because of our participants or programming, that's the easy part. The hardest part of the work we do is listening and watching people suffer without the resources they need to stay healthy and safe. Every single day, I talk to people about overdose risks, disease prevention, and infection risk reduction. People come in and report overdose reversals, ask for referrals and warm up on cold days. More than half of the people we serve are unhoused. This means that after we talk about reducing risk and after I give them sterile supplies and naloxone, they head back out onto the streets of Lewiston, a city that is unforgiving to our unhoused community.

People walk out that door and go somewhere that is hopefully safe but probably isn't. I always hope they find a public bathroom but I know the reality is that our folks are using drugs outside- in the woods, behind a storefront, in a parking lot. If they are able, maybe a friend's house. But most of the time, they are alone. Outside. No access to running water and no one to save them if they overdose.

Maine is experiencing an overdose crisis due to many factors but one of them is an unsafe drug supply. We don't have comprehensive drug checking programs or Safe Supply initiatives. Our drug laws are harmful and outdated. Overdose Prevention Centers are not radical or progressive. They keep people alive. They are the bare minimum of what we actually should have for people who use drugs. Overdose Prevention Centers are not "enabling drug use". Drug use happens and has happened for decades. It is up to our lawmakers to decide to do something different. It is up to this committee to decide if people who use drugs deserve to die alone, outside, in apartments, in cars, in public bathrooms, in tents. We are losing young people in college, parents with children, friends, care givers, tax payers.

Please vote to pass this bill. We are the people doing this work every day and we are telling you, we need this. Thank you for your time and I can answer any questions you have.